

North Carolina Women's Hospital

Use of Over the Counter Prescribed Medications in Pregnancy

Can I take the same medications that I was taking before I got pregnant?

When a woman is pregnant, she must be careful about everything she drinks, smokes, eats, inhales and swallows. You should bring all prescribed and over the counter medications, vitamins, and herbs you have been taking to your prenatal visit. Your provider will determine which are safe to take. Some are important for you to take even though you are pregnant and others are unsafe in pregnancy and an alternative medicine can usually be prescribed.

What if I need to take an over the counter medicine?

You should tell your prenatal provider about specific symptoms that you are having so that you can take the correct medicine for pregnancy. Again, bring all over the counter medications you take with you to your prenatal visit. You should avoid Ibuprofen products such as Advil, Motrin, or Aleve unless your provider or nurse specifically recommends these medications. Also avoid products that contain aspirin which can cause bleeding problems for mother and baby. You can take medication containing acetaminophen like Tylenol or Extra Strength Tylenol for pain.

See "General Discomforts of Pregnancy" fact sheet for suggestions.

What about medications for depression or anxiety or other mental health conditions?

When you find out that you are pregnant, you should immediately call the physician who is prescribing you the meds or call your prenatal care physician or nurse to determine if these meds are safe to take during pregnancy. Do not stop taking your medications until you talk to your provider.

Is it okay to take a narcotic (pain med) to make me feel better?

All narcotics whether given by a health provider or obtained "off the street" will pass through the mother to the unborn baby. When taken daily or frequently, narcotics are very addictive and the unborn baby will become addicted as well as the pregnant woman. The biggest concern during pregnancy is withdrawal. If you must take narcotic pain medications in pregnancy, the safest plan is for you to take the same dose every day so that you and your baby will not experience withdrawal. Withdrawal from narcotics (not getting a consistent dose daily) can cause the pregnant woman to be very sick and it can cause the unborn baby to have withdrawal symptoms that could lead to death. If a doctor has diagnosed you with a medical condition that

Approved by UNC Women's Hospital Patient Education Steering Committee on June 29, 2011

requires you to take a narcotic even when pregnant, your prenatal provider can contact your doctor to discuss the safest way to manage your condition while you're pregnant. Although it is sometimes necessary for a doctor to give a pregnant woman a narcotic, it should be done when there is no other alternative.

If you are using pain medications without a prescription and are not able to stop during your pregnancy, you should tell your prenatal provider exactly what you are taking and how much you are taking daily. Your prenatal provider will review the options with you to help keep you and your baby safe. There are two medication treatment options for you in pregnancy: methadone clinics and suboxone/subutex prescribed by a qualified physician, such as UNC Horizons Medical Director. An evaluation by the Horizons team can help you determine which option is best for you.

You can make an appointment in the Horizons clinic (919-966-2131) or you can talk to a counselor by calling the Horizons office at 919-966-9803. *All information you share is kept confidential.* For a list of services offered at Horizons go to www.unchorizons.com

Other sources in NC can be found at: www.alcoholdrughelp.org or call 1-800-688-4232